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CHAPTER IX

Education

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THE PROGRESS made in education was one of the reasons why Ting Hsien was named a model hsien. Four hundred and forty-seven schools and 18,666 students were reported to the hsien Bureau of Education in 1928. However, in spite of these favorable statistics, several sample studies showed that some 80 per cent of the population over six years of age were illiterate at the time of our study. Approximately one-third of the males over six years of age were literate but only about 3 per cent of the females. That very definite progress was being made on the literacy problem in some areas was shown by the figures for the 11–24 year age group in Chai Ch'eng. Fifty-three per cent of that group were literate, 65 per cent of the males and 36 per cent of the females.

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Teaching her people to read was and still is one of China's biggest problems. It was this problem that the Mass Education Movement was attacking in Ting Hsien. It was their hope that, using the Movement's Thousand Character system, they could, within three years after they had begun their hsien wide program, by 1934, teach most if not all of the hsien's seventy thousand young illiterates to read. By that system, which actually taught some 1,200 characters in its beginning course, a person could, in two months' time (later six weeks), become literate enough to read simple books, write letters, and keep accounts. A second or post-graduate course covered another 1,200 characters.

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In a study of the characters used in various kinds of written material and their comparative frequency rates in a million and a half characters the Mass Education Movement found that if a person could recognize nine characters he could read one out of seven characters in simple material. Seventy-eight characters would cover 50 per cent, 352 characters 70 per cent, and 1,169 characters 91 per cent. The Movement therefore based its first series of lessons on 1,200 characters. The combination of the characters into binomial and trinomial terms gave a total vocabulary of well over 2,000 words. In printed material published by the

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Movement phonetic symbols giving the pronunciation, both sound and tone, were printed beside any new or unfamiliar characters. The meaning of the character was given by the context.

It was generally estimated that some five thousand characters were needed for general newspaper reading.

By the end of 1931 there were People's Schools (Mass Education classes) in all the 453 villages and in the 19 satellite villages. More than 20,000 students were enrolled. The estimated cost was 40 cents per pupil. This covered classroom, equipment, light, fuel, texts, materials, teaching, and supervision. By 1932 it was possible, in some villages, to organize a campaign to enroll all of the remaining illiterate young adults and "eliminate illiteracy" in those villages. By 1934 the hsien government had taken over the promotion of the literacy classes. That year there were 844 classes in 416 villages with an enrolment of 21,170, 14,080 males and 7,090 females.[1]

The 80 per cent of illiteracy for the hsien was determined fr figures for several sample groups of families, 515 in the Experi... District and 5,255 in the 1st District, and from special literacy studies of the 11–50 age group in 500 families in the Experimental District, of the 11–24 age group in the 366 families in Chai Ch'eng, of 150 of the 362 families in Tung T'ing, and of 1,633 families in the city and 536 families in the three suburbs. Those who had had at least two years of lower primary school, or two months in a People's School, i.e., had completed the first Thousand Character course, were classed as literate. In the 500 family study individuals were given a test in which they were required to recognize and write a representative sample of ten of the characters used in the Thousand Character readers. If they failed to make a perfect score they were classed as part literate but were not included in the literate group.

The 5,255 families had the lowest literacy figures: males 5 years of age and over, 30.3 per cent, females 1.7 per cent, total 16.5 per cent. For the 400 farm families the figures were males 37 per cent, females 4.0 per cent, total 21.6 per cent. Chai Ch'eng, where the first Mass Education schools were opened in 1926, had the highest literacy figure for the

1. Dr. Y. C. James Yen, head of the Mass Education Movement, has stated that during the war years 1937–1945 over 45,000,000 people learned to read by the Thousand Character System taught in classes promoted by the Mass Education Department of the Government Ministry of Edu... tion.